

***Opening Statement of Ranking Member Kathleen Rice
Subcommittee on Transportation Security***

Hearing “The Transportation Security Administration’s FY2017 Budget Request”

March 2, 2016

All of us here today recognize the importance of TSA’s mission, and it’s imperative that we make sure TSA has the resources they need to fulfill that mission and that those resources are deployed as effectively as possible. That said, I’ve reviewed TSA’s budget request, and found aspects I agree with and certain aspects that I think warrant further examination.

First, I’m pleased to see that the TSO Basic Training will continue at the TSA Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) headquarters in Glynco, Georgia. FLETC conducts law enforcement training for more than 90 federal agencies and thousands of state and local law enforcement agencies. And I think it’s important for TSOs to know that they are being trained by the best, at the same facility as officers and agents who are directly responsible for maintaining United States National Security. I think it reinforces for new TSOs that the job they’re training for is equally important to our national security – it’s a job that our government and the American people value, that we rely on, and that we’re willing to invest in.

Last year, this Subcommittee held a hearing to assess the current state of the Federal Air Marshall Service (FAMS). We learned during that hearing that FAMS has not had an incoming class since 2011, and their attrition rate has increased. That was troubling to many of us, so I’m glad to see that some of those concerns have been resolved, and there will be a new FAMS class this year.

Of course, we know that in addition to aviation security, TSA is also responsible for protecting several modes of surface transportation. The U.S. now sees more than 10 billion passenger trips on mass transit systems each year, and nearly 800,000 shipments of hazardous materials every day. And we’ve seen evidence in recent years that ridership on mass transit system continues to grow even as gas prices decline. So I was struck by the fact that this budget request seeks only a \$12 million increase in funding for surface transportation.

I think the attempted attack on a high-speed train in France last summer served as a reminder to all of us that securing our surface transportation systems is just as important as securing our aviation systems. The threats are constantly evolving, and equally deserving of our full attention. Following that attempted attack, we held a hearing to evaluate how we are safeguarding our surface transportation systems against evolving terrorist threats.

During that hearing, one witness testified that the greatest threat to surface transportation systems is the fact that they are “wide open” – that they are more susceptible to attacks, and thus, one would think, more attractive as a target for terrorists. Another witness stated that reduced grant funding would have a drastic effect on the many transportation systems that rely on these additional funding sources – and yet TSA has not found the need to seek significant funding increases for surface transportation security in this budget request. So I would ask Administrator Neffenger to address those concerns.

I would also like to understand why TSA continues to request funding – or has not cut funding – for their behavior detection program, which at the time of the 2013 report had cost \$900 million since 2007. It has yet to be proven effective. In addition to my concerns over the cost and effectiveness of this program, we’re approaching a summer season that we expect to be one of the busiest we’ve ever seen, with some of the longest checkpoint waiting times we’ve ever seen. So I think that raises a serious question: Why would TSA want to use their resources and manpower on a program that has not proven to be effective, instead of expanding their screening capacity?

Finally, last week the Subcommittee held a roundtable with security manufacturer stakeholders to discuss the budget request. One thing that emerged from our discussion was that there seem to be discrepancies between TSA’s Strategic Five-Year Technology Investment Plan and the fiscal year 2017 budget request. I look forward to the Administrator’s explanation of these discrepancies.